

BWC Strategy Session

Best Workplaces for Commuters Districts: Distinguish Your Community

On July 26, 2005, Best Workplaces for CommutersSM continued its 2005 Strategy Session series to provide members of the BWC Network with information on distinguishing their communities as Best Workplaces for Commuters Districts. Kevin Tingley, EPA team member, and Dave Feehan, president of the International Downtown Association (IDA), co-hosted the session.

Mr. Tingley provided a brief overview of the Best Workplaces for Commuters, outlining the mission and the requirements for organizations to qualify for the list. One goal of Best Workplaces for Commuters is to provide recognition to employers that offer superior commuter benefits to employees. The list also recognizes larger organizations (e.g., business parks, downtown areas, and shopping malls) that provide these superior commuter benefits to all employees within a defined geographic area.

Benefits of the Best Workplaces for Commuters Designation to Employers and Districts

Mr. Tingley informed the group that there are many benefits of receiving the Best Workplaces for Commuters designation, as either an individual employer or district. The designation:

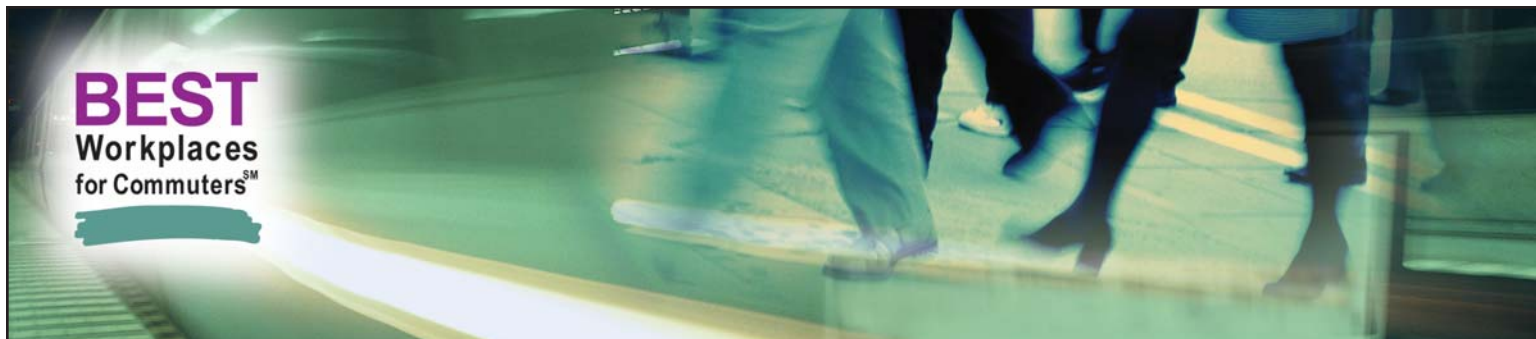
- Allows an organization or entity to distinguish itself.
- Demonstrates that an organization offers a superior level of commuter benefits, which can attract or retain employees and tenants.
- Allows an organization to use the Best Workplaces for Commuters logo in accordance with the logo use guidelines. EPA encourages employers that have received the designation to use the logo on Web sites and in job ads, newsletters, press releases, and notices to shareholders.
- Brings positive publicity.

The Best Workplaces for Commuters—International Downtown Association Partnership

Dave Feehan, president of IDA, provided background on the association and its mission. Last year, IDA celebrated its 50th year and has grown to be the oldest and largest downtown organization in the world with 550 to 600 members worldwide.

Mr. Feehan stated that downtowns have become vital as workplaces during the past 10 to 15 years, and, as a result, need to be better workplaces for commuters. To help downtowns become better workplaces, one of his goals is to involve other downtown organizations and business improvement districts in the Best Workplaces for Commuters list. Mr. Feehan also extended an invitation to all call participants to come to IDA's annual conference, taking place September 10–13, 2005, in Denver, as transportation will be a substantial component of the conference.

He concluded by saying that IDA stands 100 percent behind Best Workplaces for Commuters and is promoting the list in every way the organization can.



Tampa Downtown Best Workplaces for Commuters District

Karen Kress, Tampa Downtown Partnership's director of transportation and planning, shared information about her organization and its recent Best Workplaces for Commuters District designation.

With no current rail system and few bike lanes, Tampa is a car-dependent region. Additionally, several state-owned facilities in the downtown area impact traffic and discourage pedestrians. The Partnership is currently working on a plan with the regional metropolitan planning organization (MPO) that would make the area more pedestrian friendly.

The Tampa District's primary benefit is a vanpool subsidy offered to all downtown employees. This subsidized vanpool pass is offered through HARTline, the regional transit agency, which purchases the vans and loans them out. The district's supporting benefits include membership in a transportation management agency (TMA), ridesharing through the regional rideshare agency (the agency also offers an emergency ride home program), a shuttle via the downtown circulator trolley, and free parking for vanpools in city parking lots. The Downtown Tampa Partnership also works with companies to establish formal telework programs, and future goals include working with the city to offer preferred parking and reduced pricing for carpools. These commuter benefits are available to anyone who works in the district.

Ms. Kress has begun following up with district employers to encourage them to apply individually as a way of strengthening the designation and touting their commitment to "work-life" balance. She has publicized the designation through a newsletter, a press release, and e-mails. Additionally, Ms. Kress plans to contact the local chamber of commerce and

regional planning commission to ensure the organizations are aware of the Downtown Tampa's Best Workplaces for Commuters District designation and will also be sending newsletter articles to regional transportation organizations. She also plans on including the designation in any upcoming grant applications she submits.

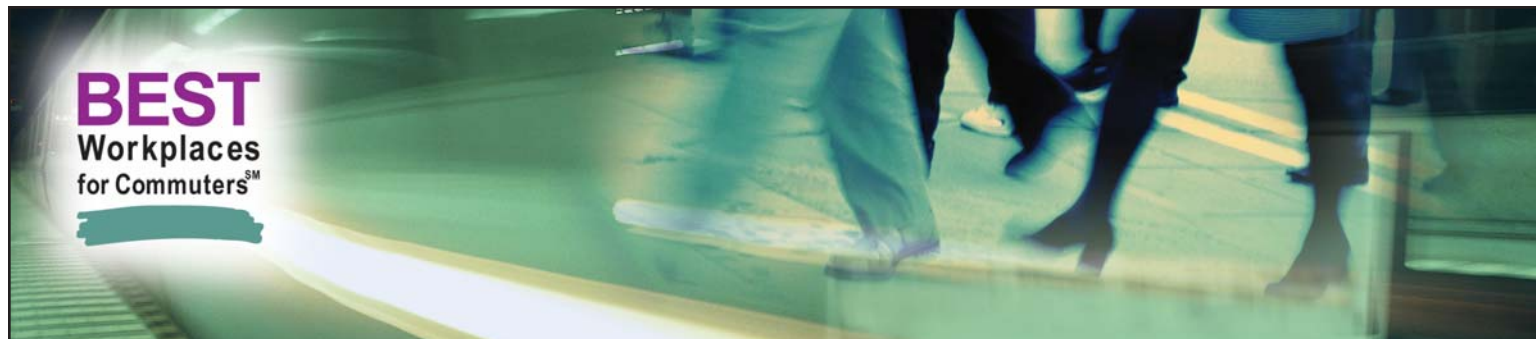
Cumberland Community Improvement District (CID) and Commuter Club Best Workplaces for Commuters

Malaika Rivers of the Cumberland CID shared some background information on the organization and how it became one of the first Best Workplaces for Commuters Districts in 2003.

The Cumberland Galleria area is one of the oldest office markets in the Atlanta metro area, with more than 70,000 employees in the immediate district and another 30,000 residents. Cumberland Galleria has about 24 million square feet of office space and 10 million square feet of retail space, a real estate investment worth about \$2.5 billion. Many corporate headquarters are located in the District, including Coca-Cola Enterprises, Home Depot and the Weather Channel. Additionally, since the district is situated on the highway system, approximately 1 million cars pass through the district's road systems every day.

In the mid-1990s, the Cumberland CID formed Commuter Club, TMA, which was the first in the state of Georgia. The TMA offers a variety of services, including a subsidized vanpool program. The TMA buys seats at a flat rate of \$50 per month for commuters interested in participating in the vanpools. There has been a great response from the community to the service, and the program has taken off—there are now 42 vanpools from the





Cumberland Galleria area. Other benefits the district offers include carpool matching services and incentives to get into carpools, as well as bus and rail passes that are discounted by 30 percent, and an emergency ride home program.

Ms. Rivers actively promotes the designation and uses the logo on annual reports and in electronic newsletters. She also makes the logo available to all companies in the district and promotes the designation. Ms. Rivers looks forward to getting even more involved with Best Workplaces for Commuters in the future.

Downtown Minneapolis Best Workplaces for Commuters District

Lynn Frank, the Employer Outreach Manager for the Downtown Minneapolis Transportation Management Organization, briefed the group on the recently designated Downtown Minneapolis BWC District.

There are approximately 4,200 employers and several office towers in downtown Minneapolis. Through the city of Minneapolis, commuters can submit a carpool or vanpool registration (either online or in the TMO's office) and receive a significant discount on parking. While the parking rate for an individual commuter averages between \$150 and \$200 per month, carpoolers pay anywhere from \$20 to \$95 per month depending upon parking ramp location and availability. In addition to reduced parking fees, the city offers four free parking lots for carpools and vanpools.

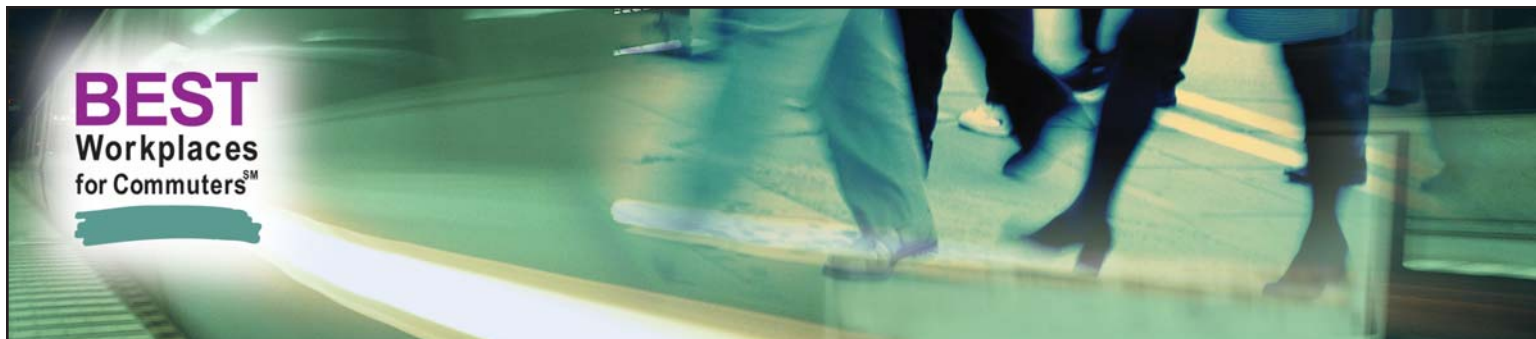
Ms. Frank suggested talking to local government offices and elected officials about the possibility of receiving the Best Workplaces for Commuters District designation. They might help you get that recognition. She also suggested talking to businesses

about the designation, as some businesses might want to contribute something to the community as a good corporate citizen. In many instances companies are concerned with public image, and an environmental cause can be just the thing with which they are looking to be involved. She indicated that it is the same with Best Workplaces for Commuters—it is an image with which people want to aligned.

Mr. Tingley mentioned that the Emeryville TMA in Emeryville, California, recently submitted an application using the proposed primary benefit option. The TMA runs a sophisticated shuttle service that takes all employees in Emeryville from the Bay Area Rapid Transit station to downtown office buildings. The shuttle service, which has won multiple awards, runs all day and is heavily used as it serves as a vital link to transit for employees. Many Emeryville commuters indicated they would have to drive to work if there were no shuttle system.

Open Discussion

- Mr. Feehan commented that he was impressed with the creativity and breadth of programs that communities are offering. He added to the discussion that housing incentives are another benefit that can encourage people to look at where they live as well as how they get to work. Some major institutions (including colleges and hospitals) offer cash incentives for housing and down payments on homes. Mr. Tingley reiterated that Best Workplaces for Commuters is open to working with cities that have incentives in place encouraging people to live downtown.
- Paul Felt of the Downtown Idea Exchange asked how pertinent the designation is to small cities where transit is not as strong in terms of infrastructure. Mr. Tingley responded that the Best



Workplaces for Commuters district designation is valuable to any community regardless of size. In many cases, parking issues or congestion drive people to use alternatives. Commuter benefits and the district designation can help any situation in which driving is more of a hassle or more of a cost than it needs to be, which applies to both large and small cities. Connie Ruth of EPA shared with the group that, in particular, vanpooling can work well in smaller or more rural areas. In rural settings, people tend to drive long distances so transit might not be an option. Vanpool subsidies can have quite an impact and be very cost-beneficial to people living in more rural settings.

- As a follow-up question, Mr. Felt said he sees the promotional value of the designation and that Tampa seems to be leveraging that value. He asked if the other cities are taking advantage of the promotional value, as well.
- In response to a question about the promotional value of the designation, Ms. Rivers said she invited companies, regional partners, and press to the ceremony announcing their designation as a district, which resulted in some local broadcast and print media coverage. Ms. Rivers also noted that every time she speaks with a reporter about the Cumberland-Galleria's services, she always mentions its designation as a Best Workplaces for Commuters District. She also mentioned that receiving the district designation can help in relationship-building with politicians. Elected officials hear complaints from the community, and the designation is something of value they can point to and partially take credit for as part of a solution. In fact, the local congressman came to the signing

ceremony for the Cumberland-Galleria Best Workplaces for Commuters District, which increased press coverage.

- Ms. Frank indicated that the Best Workplaces for Commuters has revolutionized her job as an employer outreach coordinator. It's a "win-win" for all involved.
- Regarding publicity, Ms. Kress also suggested publicizing the fact that the District is one of the first in a region. She made sure to mention that the Downtown Tampa District was only the second in Florida and 16th in the nation.

